Adams & Co. Records: Finding Aid

Finding aid prepared by Huntington Staff; supplementary encoding by Diann Benti in August 2017.
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Overview of the Collection

Title: Adams & Co. Records

Dates (inclusive): 1851-1885

Bulk dates: 1855-1863

Collection Number: mssAM 1-212


Extent: 750 pieces in 4 boxes, 12 volumes, 2 oversize folders and 1 envelope

Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department

Abstract: This collection contains records chiefly related to the years following the failure of the California branch of the express firm Adams & Co. in 1855, especially as it affected Alfred A. Cohen (1829-1887), the first receiver of the company. Other subjects include Cohen's business and legal associations (1864-84) with the Central Pacific Railroad Company.

Language: English.

Access

Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

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Preferred Citation


Provenance

Purchased from Edwin Grabhorn, April 1941 & January 1945.

Historical Note

The eastern express firm of Adams & Co. was founded by Alvin Adams of Boston, Massachusetts, in 1840. Nine years later, Daniel Hale Haskell, one of Adams' trusted clerks, was taken into partnership and given authority to establish a branch of in San Francisco. The California enterprise was so successful that by 1852 there were offices of Adams & Co. throughout the state, carrying on an extensive banking business as well as the express service. In 1854 a reorganization of the eastern interests essentially separated them from the western branch, leaving Haskell and Isaiah C. Woods at the head of the latter, with Adams as a special partner.

The new Adams & Co. continued to prosper until the financial crisis of February 1855. On the evening of the twenty-second, after the San Francisco office had experienced a mild run, the officers and counsel of the firm decided that a suspension was inevitable. They further resolved, in order to tie up the assets, to commence a suit in the name of Adams against Haskell and Woods for dissolution of partnership and to ask the courts for the appointment of a receiver. Alfred A. Cohen, a young commission merchant and real estate dealer and a friend of Woods, was urged to take the receivership.

Cohen later stated that he had accepted the post reluctantly, and only after he had been assured that, since proper management of the company's scattered assets would make them more than sufficient to meet obligations, his duties would be of brief duration. In a few days, however, it became apparent that Adams & Co. could never resume business. Anxious creditors; disregarding Cohen's receivership, attached property before it could be turned over to him. Other funds which had been, for speed's sake, transferred to him without being counted, fell short of the expected amount. The settlement of affairs promised to be long and complicated. Cohen soon asked to be discharged from the receivership. This request having been granted, in April he, Richard Roman, and Edward Jones were elected by the creditors to serve as assignees. In October, Judge John H. Hager declared these proceedings illegal and revoked Cohen's discharge as receiver, only to remove him and appoint Henry M. Naglee in his stead. Naglee then began a suit against Cohen, charging him with embezzlement. Not only Cohen, but almost everyone who was connected with the affairs of Adams & Co. was at some time or another accused of fraud. The scandals and the litigation dragged on into the 1860s.
Scope and Content
The collection includes letters and documents (including 8 scrapbooks and 2 volumes of transcripts) chiefly related to the years following the failure of Adams & Co., especially as they affected Alfred A. Cohen, who was appointed first receiver of the company. Other subjects covered in the collection include Cohen's business and legal associations (1864-84) with the Central Pacific Railroad Company and the 1876 trial, Central Pacific Railroad Co. vs. Alfred A. Cohen. Significant persons represented in the collection include: Alfred A. Cohen (16 items + 126 in letter book), Frederick Cohen (5 pieces), Augustus G. Richardson (9 pieces), H. A. Whiting (6 pieces), and Isaiah Churchill Woods (15 pieces). There is also an affidavit by James King of William and some materials related to the firm of Hoge & Wilson (5 pieces).

It seems likely that Cohen (or the Cohen family) was once the possessor of these letters and papers; a few of them relate to his affairs before and after the period related to the Adams & Co. matters. Cohen's activities as broken for Adams & Co., as lessee of the North Point Dock Warehouses, and as receiver for the California Lumber Manufacturing Company are touched on in the few letters which antedate 1855.

In January and early February 1855, Cohen's brother Frederick Cohen was employed by Adams & Co. in making an inspection of their country offices. Letters of instruction to him from I.C. Woods and other members of the firm are included in this collection.

Most of the material falls within the years 1855-1863. There are letters to and from Cohen as receiver and assignee; legal papers relating chiefly to the suit of Adams vs. Haskell and Woods and Cohen, receiver, and to the suit of Adams & Co., per Naglee, receiver, vs. Cohen; and correspondence between Cohen and his lawyers.

The later papers (1864-1884) are few in number. They consist of family letters and of documents and scraps concerning Cohen's business and legal associations with the Central Pacific Railroad Co. There are two volumes containing a typewritten copy of the official reporter's transcript of the trial in the case of the Central Pacific Railroad Co. vs. Alfred A. Cohen (1876 July 18-31)

The collection includes eight scrapbooks, probably compiled by Cohen's son, William Gibbons Cohen, after 1876. The volumes contain typewritten copies of articles from the Daily Herald and other San Francisco newspapers for the years 1853-1856, as well as clippings, dating from 1876 through 1924. Though the articles cover a wide range of subjects, most of those for 1855-1856 deal with Adams & Co. Volume eight is limited to clippings, most relating to crime in San Francisco during the years 1876-1880.

Some notable items include:
- King, James of William. Affidavit concerning his part in the events of the night of February 22, 1855 (1855 March 8)
- Cohen, Alfred A. Affidavit concerning the circumstances of his appointment as receiver and his conversations with Trenor W. Park (1855 June 30)
- Woods, Isaiah C. Letter written at sea to Alfred A. Cohen relating the details of Woods' departure and his plans for the future (1855 August 28)
- California. Courts. District Court. 12th Judicial District.

Arrangement
Documents arranged in 4 boxes chronologically, followed by 7 scrapbook volumes, and 4 oversize items (2 folders, 1 envelope, and 2 volumes)

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library's Online Catalog.

Subjects
Cohen, Alfred A. (Alfred Andrew), 1829-1887.
Cohen, Frederick.
King, James, 1822-1856.
Richardson, Augustus G.
Whiting, H. A.
Adams & Co. (Firm : San Francisco) -- Archives.
Central Pacific Railroad Company.
Hoge & Wilson.
Banks and banking -- California -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Express service -- California -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
California -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

**Forms/Genres**
Business records -- California -- 19th century.
Letters (correspondence) -- California -- 19th century.
Scrapbooks -- California -- 19th century.

### Boxes

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<td>Box 2</td>
<td>1855 February 23-1855 May</td>
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<td>1855 June-1856 July</td>
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<td>1856 September-1884</td>
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### Scrapbooks

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<td>1854-1855</td>
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<td>1855 November-1856 June</td>
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### Oversize

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<td>California. Courts. District Court. 4th Judicial District. Alvin Adams vs. Isaiah C. Woods and Daniel Hale Haskell. 1855-1858</td>
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<td>AM 42</td>
<td>Cohen, Alfred A. and others. Letterbook containing letters from Cohen as receiver and from Cohen, Roman, and Jones as assignees of Adams &amp; Co. 1855-1856</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Volume</th>
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